

Four Quarters



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SPRING 1984
TWO DOLLARS



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Vivaldi

YVES THILLET

1. Crocuses, jonquils
and tiny blue bells
peek through
the lingering late snow.
Their silent voices
sing in full color,
children crying
for somebody's lap
"my turn,
me, me, me!"

2. The laziness of August haze
subdues the bright green
hues of summer trees.
The creek is tranquil,
caught in the contagious languor
that slows the village pace.
Indolent cicadas, too hot
or tired to sing,
just stare ahead
through prehistoric eyes.
Children who venture
from the shade
move in slow motion,
blending with the landscape.

3. The cycle closes,
calendars grow thin.
The trees are stripping
to the whining wind.

Last to change
and last to shed,
the weeping willow
weeps in fading green.

I sit and wonder,
in its dubious shade,
if fall, this year,
will not mean the end.

4. The winter storm is over;
branches and twigs
now windblown glass.

The outdoor cathedral,
stained glass in shades of red,
is gently moved to music
by the winter breeze.

A lone spectator,
seemingly lost,
frozen ruby tears
fixed on his eyelashes,
enters the sculptured sunset
to the crystal symphony
of a million bells.

Sunday Songs

J. B. GOODENOUGH

They have decreed it will be so:
Narrow houses, narrow doors,
No flowers.

Mirrors will not be permitted;
What songs there are will be
Sunday songs.

Argument will be unnecessary
As laughter; therefore
Little talk.

Their women will spin and weave
The wool, its own colors,
Black, brown, grey.

Their apples will ripen green, and
The cheeks of their daughters
Will be pale.

Every Day

(for Kip Jones)

JAMES M. CORY

I'm sitting at the desk of a hotel room
8 stories overlooking Lexington Avenue
listening to the traffic –
the rumble of buses shifting gears,
the honking of taxis –
next to a suitcase stuffed with a week's dirty clothes,
the desktop piled with books of poetry,
leaning into a notebook
filled with elegant and impractical observations
about the odor of closets and hair
or the shape of a stranger's body,
how to enter that body might be
like rubbing old money
between my thumb and fingers;

now I'm staring into the bathroom mirror
while the fluorescent bulb sputters
and the shaving cream wilts
and the voices of businessmen ring through the hallway:
the lines under and around my eyes,
the creases in my forehead
where every day a thousand frowns take shape;
these are my property at thirty.

Every day is about hearing
in the movement around me
the din of innumerable lifetimes
distilled into footsteps
or into the roar of engines heaving exhaust at the sky,
the horns of impatience and despair
that blast through my skin
and fall away laughing.

The moments I thought were subtracted from my life
gather themselves into odors or mirrors,
into the language of sex or the noise of traffic
that suddenly lifts me to another hotel
twenty years ago, twenty miles away.
But this is March in the late afternoon:
someone next door switches t.v. channels,
the crowds on the sidewalk moving like racehorses.
Every day is about being afraid
of the face in the mirror
and the pen that leaks on my fingers
and the blank, beckoning pages with their insane demands.

Nebraska

NANCY G. WESTERFIELD

A name for the dry bed
Of the old cold ocean, this hollow
In the palm of the nation's hand,
Spanned end to end by a lifeline
Of river, one thumbprint of city.

Corral it by nighttime:
The township sky squared out
To frame the land: two lines
Cleanly drawn, one puzzle-cut
For fitting the sky of a notched
Neighbor, another scalloped river.
The Great Bend of the stars parallels
The running glitter of the Platte.

Down at rock-bottom, the bone of it
Marrows a hidden river; but where
You stand: water and sand and the thin
Binding of delicate grasses
Netting a basket to catch weather:
Its weather is the wind.

Lucina and the Hermit

ROBERT WEXELBLATT

I

THE FAMOUS COURTESAN Lucina was in her boudoir idly pushing a needle in and out of a scarlet pincushion. Late morning light rushed past the heavy draperies like a gust of wind, but Lucina still lay lazily in her scented bed. The cushion was a cunningly made gift; the bright silk surrounded a potpourri compartmented in such a way that, at every stroke of the needle, Lucina was treated to a new and surprising fragrance. Each time she stuck in the pin, Lucina held the cushion up to her nose and whispered "Sandalwood from Samarkand."

The senator had said so many things just about her hips; it made her laugh to think of it. Lucina had learned long ago never to laugh when senators were about, and particularly not at certain critical moments. That love was an illusion she did not doubt, but vulnerability was something else; and Lucina always respected the vulnerability of others. She accounted this her single virtue.

She remembered that Feroni's new statue was to be unveiled that afternoon. The design was shamelessly unoriginal—even Lucina could tell where he had swiped it — and yet, thanks to the friendship of the wife of a certain well-placed gentleman, it had been accepted with enthusiasm by the Commission. The model for the allegorical figure leading the people, only half-clothed in a classical toga, was herself. Feroni had been such a bore, really, like all the artists she had known. What made artists boring was their predictable single-mindedness; it was a form of vanity with which Lucina was entirely out of sympathy.

No, she would spend even the afternoon in bed if she chose. At the unveiling there would be reporters and photographers, stupid smiles, endless lies about the monument, a fearful clump of speeches to get through. No, far better to stay put; besides, she had no energy. Nothing easier than to get herself forgiven.

Lucina lay the pincushion aside and stretched first one way then another. It felt so nice that she purred like a cat. Then, on a impulse, she threw off her nightgown and looked at herself in the wide mirror on the wall at the foot of her bed. She became intrigued by the idea of

seeing exactly what her backside looked like — hips, thighs, and all — so Lucina hoisted her buttocks up into the air, twisting her neck uncomfortably to get a good view. Lucina brushed the fine hair back from her eyes, looked, and smiled.

II

Girondel burst into the white room. "Time to go out, Arnaud!" he announced.

"You can see I'm studying," answered Arnaud, whose nose was indeed stuck in a book.

"Of course you're studying. When *aren't* you studying? But it's time to leave off a bit — take a break, let it go. There's something very instructive I particularly want you to see."

"It's my one free afternoon."

"Well then, all the better."

"You don't understand. This is my only time to carry out the research for my special thesis."

"What's it on?"

"The history of political pedagogy."

"Girondel laughed. "Really? Isn't that a contradiction in terms?"

"No need to be flippant, Girondel."

"Arnaud, for a genius you're certainly deficient in irony."

"Irony's stagnant; it advances nothing."

"I'm no genius myself, of course, but I'm not at all sure I agree with you there. True, irony may not advance things much, but then you can't deny that other things conspire to advance irony."

"Very amusing. But anyway, leave me alone with Cicero, will you."

"With *Cicero*! Never!"

"You insist, eh?"

"Call it a matter of political pedagogy, if you like . . . Oh, come on, I want you to see the new monument. The unveiling's at two in Rheinach Park. Surely your specialty gives you an interest in such a statue — it's intended to inculcate all the higher virtues. Besides, I want your opinion on Feroni's work. I'm supposed to study with him next term."

"You can have my opinion *a priori*: monuments are merely bewilderments."

"You're snobbish! You're stuffy! You're pompous! You're —"

"All right, if you say so. But you already have my opinion."

Girondel struck a pose. "I know it all too well: the aesthetic is merely a snare for the senses, and, while monuments may inspire, they tend to inspire the wrong things."

"Exactly . . ."

Girondel crossed his arms like the art student he was. "I'm not budging until you agree to come with me. Only for an hour. It's quite beautiful out, whether you care or not. The sun shines just as brilliantly on the dull-witted who are enamored of externals as on the geniuses who look so very deep inside."

"I wish you'd cut out this genius-business. You know how much I dislike it."

"Precisely why I harp on it. I like getting a rise out of you and praise is the only thing that works. Besides, you really *are* a genius. Klopstock said so. Apparently you're in line for a fellowship, you old *ornement de l' université!*"

"Oh, am I."

"I heard him myself in the quad talking to the Chancellor no less."

Arnaud's mind worked so rapidly that he could not prevent himself from imagining his first lecture. "One hour, and that's all. Agreed?"

"Done!"

Arnaud smiled almost imperceptibly, which was about his limit for smiling.

III

EVERYONE PRESUMED that the beautiful Lucina must have come from a poor family. This was certainly not due to any vulgarity in her address or commonness in her habits; it was simply prejudice. Courtesans are supposed to be the miraculously well-endowed daughters of poverty; this is not only part of their charm, it is also sociological probability, a thing with which people in Lucina's circle never argued. In fact, though, everyone was wrong. Lucina happened to be the only child of a proud and wealthy foreign nobleman and his devout, rather frail young bride. Things went well for the first six years of Lucina's life; that is, up until the duel. What occurred then was that Lucina's father became embroiled with a neighbor in a suit over four acres of woodland at the edge of his estate. The neighbor, a man whose irascibility matched his stubbornness, lost the suit and at once sent Lucina's father a challenge. Upon her husband's death, Lucina's mother lost all interest in the world — and in Lucina too. The woman fell into a sort of religious imbecility and had to be placed in a sanatorium. Lucina was sent to a convent school. Fortunately, there was a quite adequate trust-fund, fattened by the sale of the four acres of woodland to the nephew of the neighbor, who had fled after the duel.

For three years, between the ages of eight and eleven, Arnaud lived deep in the woods. He was an orphan. His parents had been killed simultaneously in an automobile accident on the road which cut through the forest. The radio was playing some music of just the sort his father — a musicologist of note — particularly disliked and, in fiddling with the dial, he had lost control of the car, which collided with an oak tree. Arnaud, who had been asleep on the back seat of the roadster, was dazed by the collision and horrified by the mangled bodies of his parents. He wandered off into the forest and was found the next day by an old hermit. It was probably the trauma that kept Arnaud mute for those three years. In any event, the hermit never made any effort to get rid of the boy or to induce him to talk.

*

At the convent school, Lucina grew to loathe discipline and spirituality. Although an apt student, she was the wildest of the sisters' charges, by far the most intractable, disobedient, recalcitrant, skeptical, talented, and spirited. She was, in fact, her teachers' despair. To make matters worse, her astounding beauty and precocious maturity infuriated the nuns as much they did as her fellow students. Soon after she turned sixteen Lucina ran away across two frontiers. When she was eighteen, and after a variety of adventures, she managed to contact the office of her guardian, but only learned that in the interim he had run off with her trust fund and his legal secretary. Lucina was genuinely happy for the old gentleman and liked to think that he had profited by her example.

*

Quite suddenly, one autumn day in his eleventh year, Arnaud dropped his axe and spoke up. He told the hermit, from whom he had learned a great deal during the period of his silence, that it was now time for him to go back to the city in order to secure a formal education. The hermit — a stiffnecked and wise, if misanthropic man — talked it all over with Arnaud and agreed with the boy. Together they walked out of the forest — the hermit in a superannuated frock coat, Arnaud in patched overalls and a shirt of homespun. Somehow they found out a brother of Arnaud's father, a well-off bachelor, who showed neither surprise nor pleasure but who, upon being convinced of the boy's identity, agreed to see to his education. At school, Arnaud's peculiarities made him unpopular, but his intellectual gifts soon emerged, and, when graduation time came around, he found himself the recipient of a full scholarship to the university. He returned to the forest in the early part of that summer to see the old

hermit, but found the shack abandoned. He dutifully stayed there for two days and nights in case the hermit should come back, and then he returned to the city.

IV

Girondel literally pulled Arnaud after him through the crowd. This was not so difficult because, apart from the loafers and pensioners hovering around the outside of the assemblage, visibly jealous of their proprietary rights over Rheinach Park, those gathered for the unveiling were exclusively wealthy and important: such people insist on maintaining adequate space around themselves.

"I want to get a really good look," said Girondel when they had achieved a place satisfactory to him; that is, when they stood directly under the speakers' platform.

"You know, I think you want people to have a good look at you."

"What a mean-spirited accusation, Arnaud! But don't worry — I forgive you. I forgive you everything."

"You forgive altogether too much," mumbled Arnaud.

"Actually, the point of view's extremely important," Girondel argued carelessly, craning his neck this way and that.

Arnaud thought for a moment. "Why, you're hoping for some sort of scandal, aren't you?"

"With any luck at all," whispered Girondel. "We haven't had a scandal for so many years that people are beginning to say the country's impervious. In my opinion, a nation without artistic scandals is washed up. You might as well emigrate."

"But didn't the design have to be approved by a commission?"

"Naturally."

"Then I don't see how there could be a scandal. Commissions don't approve scandalous monuments, unless there's scandal in absurdity."

"*Mon cher* Arnaud, only the *design* was approved — not the model."

"The model?"

"Feroni worked in secret. I only heard about it myself this morning."

"What?"

"Patience, *mon ami*. Be quiet and maybe you'll learn something."

Well-bred noises issued from the elegant crowd. Arnaud checked his watch. A man in a blue shirt and matching overalls climbed onto the empty platform and did something to the sound system behind the

podium. Behind him the canvas-covered monument reared up like a small mountain range.

At last, to the sound of three trumpets, the proceedings got underway. Feroni, looking at once earnest and beside himself with amusement, marched onto the platform along with the five members of the Commission and a government minister with his wife on his arm. They all took seats (it was obvious that they had rehearsed this part) except the chairman of the Commission, who talked for about ten minutes. He was followed by the government minister, who spoke for fifteen. Both speakers alluded dutifully to the talent of Feroni's being equal to the spirit of the great events commemorated by his work. Each time his name was mentioned, Feroni's face broke up into indecipherable wrinkles and folds.

The crowd was never entirely silent during these orations; there were too many people in it more accustomed to talking than to listening. However, when the moment came for the actual unveiling of the monument — a task to be carried out by the wife of the government minister by means of a plush-covered cable — one could hear only the distant murmuring of the pensioners and the throaty exhortations of the pigeons.

A drum rolled behind the platform; the official's wife yanked the cable; the canvas dropped, and the statue stood exposed.

The gasps of people in the crowd — particularly of the females — occurred so close together that they sounded like a single gust of wind passing over the park. Girondel looked back at the crowd. Arnaud stared at the statue more attentively than he ever had at Professor Klopstack.

V

LUCINA WAS PACING from one end of her boudoir to the other in a pair of embroidered silk pajamas. Occasionally she addressed remarks to the English maid. Letty, who sat anxiously sewing at the sewing-table near the large window. Letty was not yet accustomed to her mistress's penchant for passionate speculation and this sort of thing made her feel insecure in the position.

"Up until now, Letty, I've assumed that life is simply movement — random motion — rootless and, in the strictly non-relative sense, absolutely pointless. In fact, quite *literally* without points, there being no halt to the perpetual movement of mind and body, no place to stop and consider, no anchorage, haven, harbor — you get the idea, don't you? Now, most people, I used to think, err in assuming their lives are actually a *series* of points. 'In a few weeks I'll be married' and 'Alas, next month Aunt Emilia is coming to visit' or 'Tonight George and I did it in an altogether new and pleasing way.' You get the picture, child?"

At such moments, Letty had learned it was best just to nod and get the lecture over with.

"... Well, I still think they've got it all wrong. Imagine if people *moved* like that — physically I mean, from point to point. They'd all look like automata — jerky and ungraceful. Quite a lot of them do, come to think of it. But in nature we see only spectra, Letty. In short, it isn't even one damn thing *after* another; it's just one *long* damn thing. I tried to tell Feroni that nature has neither line nor color, that we just make them up arbitrarily, but the imbecile ignored me."

At some moment in these harangues Lucina would abruptly leave off and either fall into grim pensiveness or change the subject, for example, by suddenly demanding of Letty how much the mercer's bill came to or how people in England kept their hair from curling in the fog. Lucina's mind was one of those of which people rightly say that it is always working. Misunderstood in the most condescending way, this undisciplined mental vigor was accounted one of her special attractions.

"Letty, I believe that there may just be some other possibility I've overlooked. Do you know why I believe that?"

This time Letty shook her head.

"Because I'm so frightfully *bored*, that's why. Take a cork, for instance, and an ocean liner. They're both moving on the sea, through the identical element, but the cork's aimless and helpless, poor little thing. It just keeps bobbing around until, I suppose, it gets water-logged or washed up someplace or other. But the liner has a course to follow. It's provided with an engine and a rudder and a captain and an anchor. *I'm* a cork, Letty."

"Yes, ma'am," said Letty, who was only seventeen.

"Well, but a cork's pretty resilient and can have quite a lot of fun!" Lucina declared so vehemently that it was as though she were defending herself. "Now tell me, Letty, what on earth is a cork to do when it becomes bored with all this bobbing?"

"Dunno, ma'am," said Letty, who felt a little as if she were back in school.

"Dunno either," Lucina shrugged and at once began to do a special exercise she performed for her chest. "Oh, by the way, on whose bill do we put tonight's party, Letty? I've forgotten."

Letty considered for a moment, then proudly gave her answer. "Tonight's is on the Chairman of the Commission of Public Works, ma'am."

"Thank you, dear child," said Lucina, stretching. She greatly relished calling her little maid "dear child," but wisely did not overdo it. Only the month before she herself had turned twenty-three.

During the summer of his thirteenth year, Arnaud had earned a little cash by playing chess at the seaside resort where his bachelor uncle had dumped him with the family of an employee. It began when, on a rainy day, the father of this family, a bookkeeper, taught Arnaud the game and, within three days, was losing to the boy regularly and badly. The man then purchased ten inexpensive chess-sets and a long folding table. These he placed on the public boardwalk beside a hand-painted sign challenging all comers to compete for a stake against Arnaud, who could play ten games simultaneously. The man divided the take evenly with Arnaud, once his initial investment was fully recouped. Arnaud did as he was told, of course, though he quickly wearied of chess and, in fact, had never played it since that summer.

That night after the unveiling of Feroni's monument, Arnaud sat in his room not reading. Instead, he spent one hour thinking cunning thoughts and another writing verses. He then lay down on his cot, considering certain details. Here are the verses just as he wrote them:

The Hermit

The hermit bringeth joy to living things
for that viciousness is social and he,
of all folk, is least that. The dark hemlocks
bendeth to touch his brow; the grass stretcheth
to feel his foot; and beasts, that other bite,
curlleth at his side in the frosty night.

The hermit eateth music and useth
no latrine, counteth time in melodies,
caring for neither minutes nor hours.
Grand polonaises and sad sarabandes
windeth their way through his golden colon,
emergeth no less sweet, and then roll on.

The hermit prayeth for that which he hath.
Fire he praiseth, and praiseth also
soot and mud and fear and aches and despair.
He blesseth headcolds, sumac, mosquitoes;
he blesseth winter, summer, spring, and fall;
he praiseth pain when deepest in its thrall.

The hermit's wisdom is stupidity

to some, his brain rusticated beyond
all civil use, his wit a stone's sermon
for dulness, one blank and fallow field his mind.
Yet troubled kings to the hermit hath sent
wise men to learn impregnable content.

At about midnight he prepared the envelope then, as was his habit, went straight to sleep.

VII

Lucina slipped out from under the substantial, if flaccid, arm of Feroni and into her blue velvet Bessarabian robe. She had already been lying awake for half-an-hour trying to recall all the things the hermit blessed or praised and could only remember the seasons, the headcold, the sumac, and, of course, pain. She simply had to have a look. In other words, it annoyed Lucina more that she couldn't remember all of the beatitudes than that she was trying to do so.

An hour later, over breakfast, Lucina contrived to ask Feroni if he knew anything of a certain hermit living somewhere in the national forest.

Feroni went right on stroking the inside of Lucina's thigh, for she was sitting in his lap with her robe nearly open and this was convenient to do. He replied that indeed he had heard some stories of such a hermit, but believed them to be a good deal less than true, so many folktales. "Perhaps," he went on, "once there really was a wise old hermit in those woods. There may even have been dozens of them. Once upon a time hermits were as common as highwaymen in the country, I guess. But all that's been over for a long time. The last real hermit must have died years ago. Why do you ask?"

Lucina picked up her coffee cup. "Why are *you* rubbing the inside of my thigh like that?"

Feroni laughed. "I rub it because I am a sculptor!"

"Oh ho! Then I ask because I am —"

"A what, Lucina? A curious woman? A student of folklore?"

"No, because I am a *little tiny* cork!"

VIII

Arnaud arranged to meet Girondel at the Café Bonaparte near the university. He arrived before Girondel, and so he sat down at one of the outdoor tables and ordered a beer, which he did not drink. Behind him the plate-glass window of the café acted as a mirror. It was a bright day and Arnaud observed with amusement how the students passing by on the sidewalk looked at their reflections in it. He noticed that they did not seem so much dressed as in costume.

Even people engaged in lively conversations checked their neckerchiefs and pompadours as they talked, the men no less often than the women. Apparently, the window-mirror was irresistible. After five minutes even Arnaud was tempted to look at himself, but he refrained from doing so.

Girondel showed up ten minutes late and apologized as he sat down. "I was talking to a girl," he explained.

"An English girl?" Arnaud inquired.

"Yes! How did you —"

"Very young?"

"Well, yes. She —"

"Girondel, I have an important favor to ask of you."

"A favor? *You* want a favor from *me*? This is an occasion. I'll order a double brandy!"

"Facetiousness noted."

"All right, what can I do for you, *mon ami*?"

"Very simple. I want you to say two things to two people."

"You mean give them a message?"

"No, not exactly. I only want you to manage to pronounce a couple of sentences to these two people — not at all as messages, but merely as idle conversation. I leave the occasion to you, naturally."

Girondel smiled, enjoying the mystery. "Do I know the two people, then?"

"Of course. One is the English girl who detains you so pleasantly. The other is your new *cher maitre*, Feroni."

"Feroni?"

"Surely he's not too eminent to be spoken to?"

"Of course not, but —" Girondel was clearly nervous about playing any games with his teacher. Arnaud noticed this, and at once reassured his friend that there was reason to believe that Feroni would be highly interested to hear the aforementioned sentences. "Even from a devoted student."

"Really?" said Girondel, looking askance. "And how do you come to know so much about young English girls and the interests of sculptors who make scandals?"

"Elementary," said Arnaud and laughed. "But how can I help disturbing your elevated opinion of my powers if I give away my little secrets? Let's just say I am preparing a course."

"A course?"

"Why not? One plots a course as one does a crime — in secret."

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about."

"That's just it."

"All right, then, what are these mysterious sentences?"

Arnaud straightened up, all business. "To the English girl you're to say: 'I've heard that someone met an old hermit in the national forest.' "

"Girondel repeated the sentence. "That's all?"

"That's all."

"Very well. And to Feroni?"

"To your *cher maitre* you're to say: 'Last weekend a friend of mine was hiking in the national forest and he came across a hermit living there. He talked with him for a while and was very impressed.' "

"A hermit? Oh, what a sly fellow you are, Arnaud! What can you be up to?"

Arnaud thought for a moment. "The difference between learning to have and learning to be," he said distractedly, pushing his beer across the table.

IX

It was early morning and, despite having spent almost the entire night with two senators, Lucina did not feel in the least sleepy. "Well, I suppose there wasn't much exertion involved," she explained to herself as she finished packing the knapsack. The truth was that Lucina had surprised herself, a very rare occurrence. "There's no doubt I'm amazingly eager to get going this morning," she thought, pulling the buckles tight.

As always when she shopped, Lucina had selected her clothing carelessly and yet with astounding rapidity. Her taste was instinctively fine and she had mastered the difficult lesson of not second-guessing it, as so many women do. The heather-green hiking shorts, for example, were utterly fetching — even a little too fetching after Letty had taken the cuffs up an extra half-inch. The boots she picked out, after only the most cursory glance at the two dozen styles available, were at once the daintiest and most sturdy. But now she was faced with a dilemma. Should she wear her hair down and place her new plaid cap over it at a slight angle, or should she pin her hair up beneath the cap to give herself more of a boyish look? It was indeed a tricky question, but Lucina did not even need to use her mirror to make up her mind. After all, hadn't she chosen a certain sweater in part because of how her hair would look against the wool? And so Lucina was both packed and dressed before seven o'clock. She felt girlish and as light as the music playing on her phonograph. The sun was brightening at the window. She had eaten every bit of her breakfast; the very prospect of fresh air had given her a keen appetite.

"The car's here, ma'am," Letty said, sticking her tousled head in at the open door.

"Thank you, Letty."

"Ma'am?"

"Yes?"

"When will you be back?"

"Back? Oh, any time between early afternoon and never, Letty." Lucina slung her knapsack over her shoulder in an expert fashion. "Never overplan, child," she added.

Letty looked perplexed and sleepy. Of course she would have liked to ask her mistress a hundred or so things about Girondel, who had visited her the night before and asked her to pose for him; but, before she could do so, Lucina had given her a peck on the cheek and was gone, knapsack and all.

Letty turned off the phonograph and began to gather up the breakfast tray; but then, after looking about her, she sat down on the edge of Lucina's bed, ran her fingers over the wrinkled satin sheets, and even bounced up and down a few times. "*Pourquoi pas, eh?*" she asked herself aloud. Apart from "*Bonjour, madame*" and "*Bon soir, monsieur*" it was Letty's only French phrase.

X

BECAUSE OF HIS EXCELLENT – if not altogether witting – sources of intelligence, Arnaud was able to calculate pretty exactly how many days he had to make needed repairs. One real difficulty lay in finding certain implements which would look adequately aged—a coffee pot, for example, and blankets. To this end, he had devoted one of his free afternoon to scouring second-hand shops. Thus, his outfit was not only authentic down to its fragrance, but quite cheap to boot. Apart from food, the only new things he purchased were a briar pipe, a dozen boxes of stick matches, and half-a-pound of shag. He felt the pipe to be an indispensable prop. He also had to give up shaving for a week, but the generally fastidious Arnaud was prepared for nearly any sacrifice.

*

Arnaud had lost track of the time. He was still chopping—and had even taken off his flannel shirt—when Lucina suddenly appeared almost right next to him. Her lovely auburn hair (he hadn't suspected it!) fell all over her shoulders, lit up by the noonday sun; there was a healthy ruddiness in her cheeks as inviting as any Cortland; her green eyes were merry, and her wonderfully pink thighs shone between her abbreviated shorts and argyle kneesocks. All these colors rather staggered Arnaud, but he recovered as quickly as he could and leaned on his axe.

"How do you do," said Lucina. "I'm here to find out what you've got to say."

"Is that so," Arnaud answered, reaching for his shirt and wiping the sweat from his brow with it.

"You know, you're a lot younger than I thought you'd be."

"That so."

Lucina pouted with disappointment at this impolite repetition. It certainly wasn't very promising. But then she recalled the appropriate passage:

... his brain rusticated beyond
all civil use, his wit a stone's sermon
for dulness . . .

"Let me put it this way," she insinuated, dumping her knapsack right on the pile of birch logs. "Recently I've begun to think I need teaching."

Arnaud managed a still deeper scowl, even though all this was much better than he had dared to hope. "Madam, do not mock me," he said with sudden and breathtaking dignity. "I am neither one of your side-show grotesques nor the stuff of oral history, nor yet again bait for your ambitious and patronizing anthropologist. I don't suppose you want to learn how to chop firewood or how to trap innocent furry things, do you?"

Even more surprised by his vocabulary and sentence structure than his manner, Lucina replied that, no, her interests ran to his views on grander matters, and added that her curiosity was not so idle, seeing she had hiked for two hours through primary deciduous growth in order to satisfy it.

This was such a fine speech that Arnaud really couldn't help smiling; moreover, Lucina looked so very pretty while delivering it that he couldn't help blushing. "Very well," he said. "How long have you got, madam?"

"Depends."

"That so?"

"Yep. That's so."

*

Arnaud hastily took his pipe out of his shirt and his sock of shag out of his trousers. He was leaning up against an old hickory tree by the stream. The afternoon had grown warm. Lucina pulled off her woolen sweater; the top three buttons of the tattersal blouse beneath it were negligently undone. She sat expectantly with her back against the grassy bank, left leg extended, right bent. Arnaud steeled himself, fumbled for his matches, finally found them, lit his pipe carefully, and began in a cloud of blue smoke.

"Is it correct to say, then, that you wish me to be your teacher?"

"I said I wanted you to teach me, didn't I?"

"Madam, many people are able to teach us; very few can be called

our teachers.”

Lucina smiled. At least this sounded like wisdom. “All right, then. You may consider yourself my teacher. It’s as official as I can make it.” Lucina spoke with a humoring smile and no trace of irritation.

“Very well. Now, because I’m your teacher I know better what you want to learn than you do. And because I’m your teacher I also know that I know more about it than you do. Finally, because I’m your teacher I respect not only your ignorance—which I intend to cure—but also your b . . .” Arnaud had nearly slipped and said “beauty.”

“My what?” asked Lucina pertly, reversing slowly the respective positions of her two fine legs.

“I respect your *being*. I recognize it for what it is.”

“You do all that because you’re my teacher?”

“Yes, that and more. And yet I can do nothing for you that you will not do for yourself; that is the foundation of my respect for you.”

Lucina, recalling her days in the convent-school, said that she had never had a teacher who showed any respect for students at all.

Arnaud relit his new pipe and pretended to think this over, as a kind of proof of his respect for her. “Madam, a teacher who does not teach out of respect for his student is not a teacher at all, but a confidence-artist. Such a person interposes something between the student and the object of study—namely, his own vanity, his own personality. In fact, just because of this absence of respect he will not see any purpose to teaching *other* than interposing himself; for it will be his opinion that the student is incapable of understanding what is studied, but only capable of understanding *him*. In this regard, as in many others, good teaching is like good cooking.”

Surprised but not uncaptivated by this very lengthy address—one which revealed an unlooked-for depth of thought on the subject of teaching—Lucina asked, “And how exactly is teaching like cooking?”

“In that both activities are aimed at the nourishment of others. It’s not enough for a cook to choose wholesome ingredients and refrain from drowning them in noxious sauces or scorching the goodness out of them; the cook must also remember that when the meal ends the eater is to leave the table.”

“I can see you don’t think much of disciples.”

“Disciples? No, I don’t, and I hope you don’t either. Even at its best discipleship is merely a kind of puppy-love. It has no weight and is a confusion.”

Lucina had an idea. “But one may also cook for oneself. Isn’t that so?”

“Indeed.”

“Can’t one be one’s *own* teacher, then?”

“For the instructed, it’s never otherwise,” said Arnaud sen-

tentiously.

For the instructed!" cried Lucina. "Oh, but who instructs the instructed?"

Arnaud's pipe had gone out yet again. As he relit it he stared at the vicinity of Lucina's rib-cage underneath the tattersall shirt with its three undone buttons. "First others," he puffed, "then themselves. A child can't cook, but must first be shown how. After that it's a matter of commitment."

Lucina clapper her hands together. "Ah then, teacher, in what way do you respect *me*? Am I only an ignorant girl who must be shown the way to her commitments?"

Arnaud had no idea what to say to this; he felt himself tottering and so he got to his feet and looked down into the stream where the stones had been rubbed smooth by the water. "Here," he said to himself, "is a worthy struggle."

XI

Lucina's boudoir was lit by two candles. By their light Letty looked at Girondel's three pastel sketches of her and pointed to one of them, making a face. "Why'd you draw my hip like that?" she demanded.

"I draw what I see," said Girondel with a grin.

"Really? And do you see my hip as a great bulge?"

"A bulge? It's an exceptionally nice hip, Letty. Not at all a bulge."

"Oh, so you exaggerated it?"

"Well no, not exactly. Actually I—"

"What time is it?"

Girondel went and got his watch from the bureau. "It's eleven-thirty," he said.

"Then you've got to leave."

"Why?"

Letty was already pulling the Bessarabian robe out from under Girondel's trousers. "Because I'm expecting company," she said coldly.

Girondel laughed. "So, the pupil has big ideas," he said.

"Get out."

XII

It was morning and they were sipping coffee. Arnaud sat on his tattered army-surplus sleeping bag, which was rolled up on the flat ground where he had spent the night.

"But to live fully in each moment is beautiful," Lucina was objecting.

"No doubt. But such beauty is of little avail. Moments of that kind of beauty are only like diamonds."

"I'm extremely fond of diamonds!" said Lucina sincerely.

"You ought to get over them, then. Diamonds are dead. Nothing leads up to or away from diamonds. Water, on the other hand, is not only alive but of universal use. Water flows, connecting all sorts of things, yet is itself always the same. You can't hold it, and yet it's what we mostly are. Water holds us. On top of that, water's tougher than rocks and is able to wear away even diamonds—in the long run."

"One ought to be tough?"

"Only as tough and as gentle as water, not hard and brittle like diamonds."

"Ice, on the other hand, is a nickname for diamonds. Water freezes . . . But look, why've you become a hermit, living out here all by yourself? Isn't *that* being more than a little like a diamond in a frozen lake?"

Arnaud put down his cup and looked hard at Lucina. He had not been mistaken in her. Feroni was indeed a master; however you looked at her, she was formidable.

"A hermit is like anyone else," he said, "except that he can't bear vices."

"What do vices have to do with it?"

"All vices are social."

"A very diamond-like saying, especially when you turn it around," Lucina retorted. "But do you refer to the vices of *other* people or to your *own*?"

"They're one and the same, I'm afraid," said Arnaud pressing his fingers together nervously.

"That so?" said Lucina, then opened her mouth wide and laughed.

Arnaud was overwhelmed by the musical sound and thought that if one really were to subsist on the sounds, Lucina's laughter would make a very tasty dish.

"What you most need to learn," he persisted, "is how to stand."

"I've been told by experts that my posture is impeccable."

Arnaud thought that her absolute pertness was almost unfair, like her coloring. "Then your experts have been looking at the wrong thing," he said doggedly. "How one stands determines what one can resist, what one can bear. For example, you do not understand the art of standing *still*."

"That's true," said Lucina, frowning at Arnaud. "Do you?"

Arnaud answered by merely pointing to the shack.

"All right. Granted that you've mastered how to stand still," said Lucina, "but does that prove you know how *not* to stand still?"

"There's no art to not standing still. "It's like the so-called art of

concealment, which is not really an art either, but only a way of sticking within one's own skin, in which, of course, we all are born. Genuine revelation is an art, though art is scarcely ever genuine revelation. Speaking nobly and truthfully is an art. Devotion is an art and even has its virtuosos. But bouncing from here to there, tossing out illusions at one moment, succumbing to them at others, or just remaining mute—these are the proper doings of infancy.”

Lucina had been attending very carefully to this; she approved of some of it, and said so. “However,” she added, “I don’t at all agree that it’s easy to remain silent. In my experience very few people know how to hold their tongues.”

“Yes. Remaining quiet can also be an art.”

“But you said —”

“It’s a *social* art, like duplicity or contract bridge. However, to refrain from trivial speech is a sort of art only if the possibility of untrivial speech exists alongside it. By itself, muteness proves nothing except as a prelude to a well broken silence. To speak well, one must speak *from* somewhere, however. And this, in turn, depends entirely on how one stands.”

Lucina sighed and stretched. Listening was a strain for her; she was not accustomed to it, or to standing still in order to listen.

“With me,” she said softly, “nothing is ever easy until it’s over—when I know I’ll be able to do it.”

This was such an artful revelation that Arnaud got to his feet and made himself yawn, an act which provoked a real yawn. He had not slept either well or much, and when he did he suffered from disturbing dreams. “A thing is easy to do only if there’s no resistance to doing it from the inside or the outside. In your case, the resistance is all on the inside.”

“Yes, that’s exactly so,” he admitted Lucina, who also got to her feet.

They were now standing quite close together. Arnaud unconsciously took Lucina’s hand. “What you must learn, madam, is that prohibitions can be meaningful and appropriate as well as merely stuffy and priggish. Doing what is unlike oneself, for example, is always a violation which revenges itself.”

“Do you really know nothing at all about me?” Lucina asked archly, looking straight into Arnaud’s eyes.

Setting his feet firmly, Arnaud replied, “One can only know two kinds of things about other people.” His heart was pounding in a way that irritated him.

“Oh?”

“What they try to tell us and what they tell us without trying.”

Lucina looked down, but did not attempt to release her hand. “When you say things like that you’re very nearly—insufferable!”

"You see," said Arnaud, unconsciously beginning to raise her hand to his lips, "you're already learning something about standing—you're learning how to stand *me!*"

Lucina smiled and discovered that she was enjoying herself tremendously.

XIII

HERE IS HOW THINGS stood when it began to rain. Lucina had been in the forest for five days, though she had to admit it did not seem nearly so long as that. Of course there were occasions when she longed for her bed, for her phonograph, and especially for her sunken bathtub; but these were surprisingly few. Arnaud had taken her on hikes to high places with good views, to a pond of clear water where he left her for an hour to bathe, and to a meadow where they picked wild strawberries. At night they played gin rummy or canasta and continued what had come to seem a single colossal conversation. It was unavoidable that Lucina should begin to think of her teacher as resembling the ocean liner; but no less inevitable that she should become suspicious of his purposes. There was also his physical manner toward her to consider. The contrast between his mental fluency and his physical discomfort rather amused her. Naturally, she understood this schism perfectly, and yet she found it touching and challenging rather than tedious. Certainly, she did not wish to seduce him—what would be the point of that?—yet, at the same time, she could hardly help doing and saying things that heightened his discomfort. To begin with, this was merely habit asserting itself, but of late she found herself doing so with a sort of conscious conviction that was not familiar to her. In sum, Lucina felt that, in some sense, she was engaged in a battle, though she was by no means certain whether winning it would be preferable to losing it. Such a battle is never boring, never wearying. On the contrary.

For his part, Arnaud was nearly beside himself with self-control. While Lucina was bathing in the pond, for instance, he sprinted through the woods until he literally dropped. A thousand times he had been on the verge of simply grabbing her, of slipping into the shack in the middle of the night, or of burying his head in her lap as they sat talking by the stream. But Arnaud was an excellent capitalist of the spirit; and so long as he kept his goal clearly before him he had something on which to gain a purchase, no matter how tenuous.

*

They were confined to the shack. The rain poured down right through the trees. The place where Arnaud slept had turned at once into a mire. The roof leaked a little at the corners and the sound of the water on it was loud. While Arnaud built a birch fire, Lucina talked about an idea she had begun thinking through the night before.

"It seems to me you divide existence into only two conditions, though you've certainly got enough names for them and this gives the appearance of complication. On the one hand you like to talk about people who are devoted, committed, grounded, anchored, faithful, serious, ordered, purposive, bearlike, and so forth; while on the other, there are the drifters, illusionists, mannequins, butterflies, stuffed heads, mocking-birds, floaters, loose marbles, etcetera. You associate all kinds of states with one category or the other: such as pleasure, extroversion, triviality, meretriciousness, and weightlessness with one; and discipline, nobility, gravity, endurance, and unshakable conviction with the other. Most significant of all, you seem to think one condition can yield only joy, while the other provides real happiness."

"Do I?"

"You most certainly do."

"I see," Arnaud mumbled, gritting his teeth and lighting the kindling.

"But this boiling things down appears to me cruelly severe and altogether too abstract. In reality, people move back and forth from one condition to another so rapidly that you can't honestly fix where they are at any given moment, let alone sum up their lives . . . or at least that it's unfair and wilful to do so. If you take a snapshot of a swimmer he looks like he's drowning."

"That so?" croaked Arnaud.

"Yes! And don't patronize me!" Lucina was becoming angry. Dampness was not her favorite element.

Arnaud sat himself down cross-legged before the fire so that he could blow on it and swore that he was not thinking of patronizing Lucina. In fact, he turned around and begged her to on on with her analysis, though he couldn't help noticing that her knees were dimpled, for they were at approximately the level of his eyes.

"Well," Lucina said with vehemence he could hear but a smile he was unable to see, "for example right now *you* are exercising the conviction of a teacher, right? *You're* anchored and bear-like and what-not?"

"Yes, I hope so."

"But you're also—underneath that groundedness and all that conviction, which I don't question for a second—you're imagining something very different, aren't you?"

"What we do in spite of ourselves is not ourselves. However, I really don't know what you mean, madam," said Arnaud.

"Oh, this madam-business!" Lucina said so loudly that Arnaud looked over his shoulder and made a puzzled face.

Lucina got up from the narrow rush chair and began pacing in exactly the way she used to do in her boudoir before Letty.

A hermit? I don't believe you're a hermit at all. I also don't believe that you don't know my name. And I most certainly don't believe that those verses were written by anyone named Carolus Arnoldi!"

"What verses, madam?" said Arnaud desperately to the lambent flames.

As the noise of the rain on the roof and the sound of the fire grew still louder, so did Lucina's voice. But, as she shouted, Lucina quietly stepped out of her heather-green shorts, out of her yellow peasant-b blouse, out of her dainty and sturdy boots.

"It's been one long argument, teacher, hasn't it? But I think you're finally beginning to learn a thing or two," she declared as angrily as if she were not becoming naked. "You only thought of making me over, of dominating me by force of argument, when the truth is that you were in need of teaching yourself. Now you're learning that teaching is not the same thing as instruction and that learning is not at all the same as conversion. I, on the other hand, have learned something too—only I'm frankly not sure whether it's what you *meant* to teach me or not. Maybe it is.

"And what's that?" Arnaud asked in a strangled voice, still staring at the rising orange and blue flames.

"I'm learning the difference between being desired and being . . . ,"

"Being what, madam?"

Lucina, smiling not at all pertly now, but with the same serenity, wisdom, and resolution depicted by Feroni in his scandalously truthful monument, put her two hands gently on Arnaud's two shoulders. "Loved," she said softly right into his left ear.

Arnaud shut his eyes and let himself feel the heat of the fire, the warmth of Lucina's still tentative embrace. The course was over, the crime executed, the king mated. But Arnaud no longer cared whose king, whose crime, whose course.

Music

SCOTT MINAR

It has nothing to do with the ear really.
Music moves in between
even itself. It is like wind.
Its connections are never certain,
never seen with the eye.
Each passage turns to its own movement,
the way crabapples twisting
in a breeze
show every part of themselves.

Certain Flowers Persist

ROY BENTLEY

1

To feed the robins
and redbirds of Southeast Ohio
you feed a few crows.
Dark and loud above yesterday's bread,
they strut the edge of a cistern top.
Light on their feet,
never long in one place, they remind me
of the night I said simply:
Mommy, can we see that woman with the kayak again?
Snow falling straight near the eave
rises and breaks
smooth as the lie my father told to cover himself:
Would I do that and take him with me?
Another gust and bread
collects above the cistern, half-circles upward.
What woman?
A last crow stands eyeing crust.
By fence, slow cat stretches.
What kayak?

2

By the time I could spell *gasoline*
it had become the one thing that reminded me of my father.
Somehow the cigarettes and Old Spice
never quite overcame it.
Twenty years later, there is so much I could do without —
memory of how he left,
Sundays before that, riding the tank of his Harley
out Wilmington Pike,
backroads past the station he owned,
beyond the filled parking lots of churches,
into Kettering from the Greene County side:

hands over his on the grips, head high,
hair cut like his.
Because he took me with him
more than once
before finally standing in the living room
of the house on Comanche Drive,
hugging my mother who he had just divorced. . .
Because he took me with him
I forgave the time I called him all day,
his saying he would be right there,
that he never came.

Because he took me with him
I read to my son as if there were no such time.
Head on my chest, he listens,
closes the book, holds out a hand
and says the two words he knows best: *ice cream*.
Suddenly it is Sunday.
I am flying past fields,
noise of tractor loud as locusts.
And always the smell from hands, brown
uniform shirt reading *Roy's Shell*.

3

By the Chesapeake & Ohio line
outside of Nelsonville, honeysuckle grows
as if spilled coal and rust were heaven on earth.
Certain flowers persist.
Even in winter they will not let go.
Like the hundreds of thousands who exist
day to day,
these vine-roots have a sense there is water,
and if water, reason to grow.
Each spring those who walk here
choose between the short stride of railbed,
the grab and tangle of that which will not be moved.
You can tell newcomers by the black knees
of their pants, cinder burns,
the quick curse they have for honeysuckle.

Emmaus

LOUIS Mc KEE

A fly knows no better,
sees the day, the trees and grass,
but at each try for them
goes headlong into the window.
I am just as clumsy
moving through this house,
already a home before
I have anything to do with it,
filled with children and pets
I meet at every turn.
Pictures claim these walls,
knowing looks I dare not return.
There are dreams, too,
which haunt stairways and closets,
whole rooms of them that sit
just waiting to be disturbed.
The very presence of them
dares me to intrude.
Then, worse, there are the words,
hanging around the bedroom.
I cannot walk into the room
without having them slip
over my face and hands
like cobwebs trying to get hold of me.
I am too big to be caught,
I know, but it is almost as though
they don't know it,
and I react each time
with an old fear. I want to leap
headlong for the window.

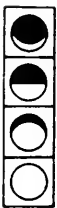
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